

Teaching Artists: Considering Program Design

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The ideas and curiosities you have in your life as a practicing artist are the ideas and curiosities that fuel your work as a teaching artist. The things you value in your life, the things you wonder about and your process of exploration are evident in the way you approach your work. Your approach to artistic inquiry and action informs the way you design and present your school residency programs and work in the community.

How can you find the best fit between your own process of thinking about and making art with the needs and interests of the school or community site that is hosting you? How can your own work as an artist help illuminate and address the state arts and academic standards in ways that are authentic to your artistic approach and your arts discipline? I suggest four broad ideas that may be useful to you as you develop your programs and continue to refine your work as a teaching artist. They are:

- 1) backward mapping and teaching for understanding,
- 2) the studio model,
- 3) the role of inquiry,
- 4) ongoing assessment and performances of understanding.

Learning for Understanding

Students are constructors of knowledge who interpret information, integrate it with their previous understandings and construct new understandings of the world. Students as “learning-artists” should be given problems to solve that share features with those that intrigue professional artists. This enables students to engage in and identify with artistic processes central to creative thinking.

How, for example, do you learn to roller-blade? Certainly not just by reading instructions and watching others, although these actions may help. Most centrally, you learn by skating – and if you are a good learner, by thoughtful, reflective skating; you pay attention to what you are doing, capitalize on your strengths, and work on your weaknesses.

It is the same with understanding. Understanding is active - it involves applying information, synthesizing, extrapolating. The mainstay of learning for understanding is actually carrying out performances of understanding. Learners must spend a large part of their time with activities that ask them to do thought-provoking tasks and apply their understanding on their own. And they must do these things in a thoughtful way, with appropriate feedback to help them continue to do better.

Program design and planning

One useful process to help guide you through your residency design and planning is called **Backward Mapping**. It consists of three general parts:

- 1) What do you want your students to understand about the topic, ideas, or skills you are teaching? These are your ***understanding goals***.
- 2) How will you know the students really understand the ideas, tools, and processes you present? How will you Create or identify their ***evidence of understanding (ongoing assessment)***.
- 3) What ***learning experiences*** can you design and present to help build that understanding for your students? What will need to be taught and coached, and how can it best be taught in light of your understanding goals?

The Studio Model

In terms of presenting your residency or singular session think about the ways you tend to approach your work as a practicing artist. You often warm-up to the “making of the work” through any variety of ways; thinking through the questions that you are exploring, gathering your material, clearing the space, doing a physical , vocal , quick sketch, etc. warm-up. This introduction is the same kind of experience you want to provide to your learning artist students. The ‘heart’ of the process is the involvement you have in making work. This engagement with artistic thinking and doing enables you to explore your thinking, your skill sets, and to put ideas into action. It is the studio work. The reflection or inquiry process is at play throughout your work as an artist. You are always tweaking and refining your work, exploring a particular question or intention. What do I see here? I wonder if.... It seemed to really work when I

Those three aspects of making work should also be present in the work you present as a teaching artist.

Introduction: The project, lesson or session should include an introduction to the topic. Set the context and a specific entry point.. Provide a specific warm-up to the work that will follow. Start with success. Make sure the first learning experience is a good time and has an immediate experiential reward.

Studio Work: Give students opportunities to make and review work in the artistic medium based on the topic and your specific understanding goals. Let the doing open up the learning. Follow a line of inquiry and build toward some kind of learning pay off.

Closure/reflection: Bring the active experience to a close using inquiry questions and reflection processes.

Inquiry and Questioning Techniques

Questions help guide students’ reflective thinking about the work they made and the work they’ve observed. Open-ended questions prompt students to engage more deeply in the thinking process. By open-ended we mean problems without clearly defined methods of solution and without one right answer. These are the kinds of issues that professionals in the arts work on. No one tells a painter what to paint or how to paint it; nor does anyone tell a conductor how to perform a score. Students too can be given problems that they must define and solve for themselves. In looking at pieces of performance or fine art work we want to ask students “What’s going on here?” (understanding) and “What do you see that makes you think so?”(evidence/assessment). Good questions help students to be energetic thinkers so how can reflection and questioning techniques help us to make considered choices? Consider the questions: What do we learn by making the work and what do we learn by watching? - and find ways to include both experiences for the learners in your program, no matter the age or setting.

Ongoing assessment and Performances of Understanding

How can we assess accurately and fairly what our students have learned? This is a question every teacher and teaching artist wrestles with. When building understanding is the purpose of instruction, the process of assessment is more than just one of evaluation; it contributes to and informs learning. Assessment that fosters understanding needs to inform students and teachers/teaching artist about what students currently understand and about how to proceed with subsequent teaching and learning to extend and deepen understanding.

Performances of Understanding help learners to build, as well as express, understanding. These understanding activities require learners to use knowledge in new ways or situations. The understanding performances are activities in which students reshape, expand upon, extrapolate from, apply and build upon what they already know.

Think of a director's work as (s) he prepares dancers, actors and crew for a stage production. Each rehearsal is a continuous cycle of performance and feedback as the actors work through the scenes. The director gives initial instructions, offers advice and further direction while each scene is in progress, and convenes more formal feedback sessions at various points during the rehearsal. This integration of performance and feedback is exactly what students need as they work to develop their understanding of a particular topic or concept. Ongoing assessment is the process of providing students with clear responses to their performances of understanding in a way that will help them develop and improve that understanding.

This integration of performance and feedback is exactly what students need as they work to develop their understanding of a particular topic or concept. In this way Understanding Goals (What do you want your student to understand?) and Ongoing Assessment (What will serve as evidence they understand it?) are tied together.

Resources

Arizona Commission on the Arts

The Arizona Commission on the Arts is an agency of Arizona State Government funded by the State of Arizona and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Arts Commission works to broaden, deepen and diversify the arts across the state and to imagine an Arizona where everyone can participate in and experience the arts

<http://azarts.gov/>

Perpich Center for Arts Education, Minnesota

The Perpich Center for Arts Education strengthens the arts education community, and improves access to high quality arts experiences to students statewide.

<http://www.pcae.k12.mn.us/>

The Lincoln Center Institute for Arts in Education

Lincoln Center Institute (LCI), the educational cornerstone of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, is a global leader in education and the arts. Founded in 1975, the Institute is known for its inventive repertory, and brings dance, music, theater, film, visual arts, and architecture into classrooms in the New York City area, across the nation, and around the world.

<http://www.lcinstitute.org/wps/myportal>

Harvard Project Zero

Project Zero is an educational research group at the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University. Project Zero's mission is to understand and enhance learning, thinking, and creativity in the arts, as well as humanistic and scientific disciplines, at the individual and institutional levels.

<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/index.cfm>

The Dana Foundation

The Dana Foundation is a private institution based in New York dedicated to the support of activities and publications in science, health, and arts education.

<http://www.dana.org/>

The Wallace Foundation

The Wallace Foundation seeks to support and share effective ideas and practices that will strengthen education leadership, arts participation and out-of-school learning.

<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/Pages/default.aspx>

The New England Consortium of Artist-Educator Professionals

The New England Consortium of Artist-Educator Professionals is dedicated to the support and development of teaching artists. NECAP collaborates with the arts agencies of the New England states, other organizations, and individuals to advance the field of the artist-educator, increase access to quality professional development, develop a regional network and support a community of teaching artists.

http://www.artisteducators.org/necap_about.htm

The Association of Teaching Artists

The Association of Teaching Artists (ATA) is a non-profit professional association whose mission is to advocate, strengthen, and serve Teaching Artists from all disciplines in New York State and beyond. The Association of Teaching Artists serves to create a community of professional Teaching Artists, to empower the practice of Teaching Artists as a profession and to provide a network for communication and the exchange of resources.

<http://www.teachingartists.com/>

Teaching For Understanding: Harvard's Project Zero

The Teaching for Understanding project was a five-year research program designed to develop and test a pedagogy of understanding using the following four questions as a foundation for its framework: what topics are worth understanding; what about these topics needs to be understood; how can we foster understanding; how can we tell what students understand?

<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/Research/TfU.htm>

<http://learnweb.harvard.edu/ALPS/tfu/about2.cfm>

Teaching by Design

Teaching by Design shows readers how to use the computer to design meaningful educational materials for children and adults with special needs. A synthesis of computer graphics, education, and crafting, this book represents the author's considerable expertise in customizing educational materials for her daughter with multiple disabilities as well as teaching other parents and teachers to create them too.

http://www.woodbinehouse.com/main.asp_Q_product_id_E_1-890627-43-7_A_.asp

Credit: Blythe T. Bondy, C.E., & Kendall, B. (1998). Ongoing assessment. *The Teaching for Understanding Guide* (pp. 7188). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Booth, Eric (2009) *The Music Teaching Artist's Bible; Becoming a Virtuoso Educator*. New York: Oxford Press

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Throughlines Dance and Theatre: Action in the Idea

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